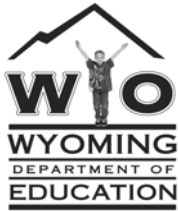


The Wyoming/Montana RtI Project



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To: Wyoming and Montana Directors of Special Education

From: Nance Shelsta
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Regarding: Pilot Study on Response to Intervention (RtI)

The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) presents schools an opportunity to provide early intervening services for children not yet identified as eligible for special education. The IDEA 2004 also encourages schools to examine evaluation alternatives to the "discrepancy model" in learning disability identification. Response to intervention is one method of bringing structure to the delivery of early intervening services while simultaneously providing an evaluation alternative to the discrepancy model in learning disability identification. There are indications that the combination of these two key elements (early intervening coupled with better evaluation practices) will have a positive impact on student outcomes, reduce disproportionality in identification of minority children for special education, and reduce the overall number of children served by special education.

The Wyoming Department of Education, Special Education Unit, and the Montana Office of Public Instruction, Division of Special Education, are jointly developing a three-year pilot program to implement Response to Intervention (RtI) models in selected Wyoming and Montana schools. The two state agencies are collaborating with the University of Montana, the University of Wyoming, and Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center.

Response to Intervention models may assist students that struggle in early education years, decrease the number of students with identified learning disabilities, and increase academic progress for all students. If properly implemented, RtI models show promise in improving

identification procedures for students with learning disabilities and can serve to help prevent academic failure.

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities identified core elements of successful RtI models:

- a. Students receive high-quality, research-based general education instruction.
- b. General education staff actively participate in assessing student progress in the curriculum.
- c. The school implements methods to continually monitor student performance and identify individual student difficulties.
- d. School staff implement specific research-based interventions that address identified student difficulties and use progress monitoring data to assess the intervention effectiveness.
- e. The school completes a systematic assessment of the fidelity or integrity that instruction and interventions were implemented.
- f. The school has written policies, procedures, and operations that describe the RtI model.
- g. Schools identify and implement standardized protocol or individualized programs to best meet the identified needs of the school, district, and community.

The Wyoming and Montana Special Education Units will implement up to four pilot programs in elementary schools in each state (a total of 8 elementary schools) to determine RtI models and interventions that are effective in rural education systems.

Schools interested in being a pilot school are expected to:

- a. complete a self-assessment of existing RtI core elements,
- b. organize and implement an educational task force comprised of members that meet certain criteria,
- c. commit to participate in and complete intensive ongoing RtI training,
- d. collect and report student and school outcome measures,
- e. identify in-kind funding sources to implement the model, and
- f. present findings during a WY-MT joint meeting at the end of the pilot program.

Selected RtI schools will implement programs that are likely to decrease the number of students with identified learning disabilities, as well as increase the educational success of underachieving students and other students. Participating schools will have increased opportunities to provide research-based general and special education curriculum for all students, based on identified needs. Response to Intervention schools will have the unique opportunity of participating in a joint educational effort between two states and be on the leading edge of identifying interventions that effectively address the needs of students that receive services in rural educational systems.

In the first year of the pilot study, elementary schools serving low-poverty communities and elementary schools serving high-poverty communities will be selected for participation. A second cohort of secondary schools may be added to the pilot study in year two or three.

UPDATE September 27, 2005:

The schools that have been selected for the State of Montana are: Gardiner Elementary in Gardiner, Montana; Jefferson Elementary in Glendive, Montana; K. William Harvey Elementary in Ronan, Montana; and Roosevelt Elementary in Great Falls, Montana.

The schools that have been selected for the State of Wyoming are: Afton Elementary in Afton, Wyoming; North Elementary in Casper, Wyoming; Jackson Elementary in Jackson, Wyoming; Hanna Elementary in Hanna, Wyoming; and Northpark Elementary in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

If you have further questions, please contact:

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